

[By Wilson Ring](#)

Vermont U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy and Rep. Peter Welch are calling on Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, which they claim is caught up in partisan politics in the U.S. House.

A proposal that would reauthorize and expand the act to include victims of same-sex domestic violence, same-sex partners and expand the use of the program on tribal lands passed the Senate by a large margin, but a version that passed the House stripped the proposal of a number of provisions that Leahy and Welch say are critical to protecting all members of society.

Speaking at a Burlington news conference, Leahy and Welch said Friday that working to stem domestic violence has traditionally been above partisan politics, but the version of the bill that passed the House changed that.

"Their bill fails to include protections we have for under-served victims, like immigrant women, Native American women, gay and lesbian victims," Leahy said.

"What infuriates me is this: They have overlooked the fact that a victim is a victim is a victim," said Leahy, a former prosecutor who witnessed firsthand the effect of domestic violence when he was called to crime scenes.

"Our goal in the House is to essentially pass the bi-partisan Senate bill that got 68 to 31 votes," Welch said.

Leahy and Welch were joined by Karen Tronsgard-Scott of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, which has used funds provided by the bill to reduce domestic violence.

Tronsgard-Scott said that since the act was first passed in 1994, the rate of intimate partner violence has dropped 63 percent in the country while domestic violence homicides have dropped by 24 percent for women and 48 percent for men.

The law has provided millions of dollars to programs across the country such as legal assistance for victims, enforcement of protection orders, transitional housing aid and youth prevention programs. Last year, Vermont groups received \$3.1 million through the program.

The version passed by the Senate would expand the law to specifically protect gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender Americans from discrimination and abuse. But many Republicans saw that as a provocation and they voted against a bill approved without objection previously.

The Senate version also changed the way domestic violence could be prosecuted on tribal lands, which some Republicans feel would be unconstitutional. House Republicans say their version, which passed by a vote of 222-205, protects taxpayers from fraud and keeps the prosecution of criminal behavior on Indian lands constitutional.

During a debate on the floor of the U.S. House earlier this month, North Carolina Republican Virginia Fox said "Republican men and women both abhor violence against women. ... We want to see the (federal) money spent better."